

THE STATUS OF THE BLACK-THROATED LOON (*GAVIA ARCTICA*) AS A NORTH AMERICAN BIRD.

BY F. SEYMOUR HERSEY.

IN collecting and tabulating data for use in the distributional portion of Mr. A. C. Bent's work on the Life-Histories of North American Birds, the published material on the Black-throated Loon was found to be unsatisfactory,—the records of various observers being frequently indefinite or in many cases not based on actual specimens secured. The earlier writers gave the species a rather wide range in North America, which has been gradually restricted until in the present A. O. U. Check-List it is stated to breed only in the Kotzebue Sound region of Alaska, and from Cumberland Sound south to Ungava, while some half dozen scattering localities in the United States are said to have been visited casually in winter.

It was finally decided to verify, so far as possible, all North American records and requests for data were sent to all who were in a position to give authentic information concerning any of the various records or the specimens on which they were based. The results of this correspondence proved no less interesting than surprising.

Mr. Bent has very generously placed all this data in the hands of the writer. He has also examined and measured the specimens of this species and *Gavia pacifica* in the collections of the U. S. National Museum, the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy (including the Bangs collection) and the private collection of Mr. William Brewster. Mr. W. DeW. Miller of the American Museum of Natural History and Mr. P. A. Taverner of the Geological Survey of Canada have measured the birds in the collections of those institutions and Dr. Louis B. Bishop has sent notes and measurements from the specimens in his collection. I have tabulated below, by locality, the various records and the results of our investigations.

Alaska: It was formerly supposed that the Black-throated Loon ranged along the whole Bering Sea coast of Alaska. There

are two specimens in the National Museum collection (No. 64303, St. George Id., Pribilofs, June 22, and No. 76004, St. Michael, taken by Nelson) and one in the collection of Mr. Brewster (No. 48760, Nome, August 20, 1905). All other Alaskan specimens that we have examined are *pacifica*. The breeding of the species in Kotzebue Sound appears to rest on the records of Grinnell (Pacific Coast Avifauna, No. 1) of two sets of eggs taken in 1899. Dr. Grinnell writes under date of April 11, 1916, "In my Kotzebue report it is my impression that I simply followed the custom of preceding naturalists in the region (Nelson, et al) and used the name *arctica* on no other ground." He also states, "There are no birds in any of our collections, from the Kowak region of Alaska, but I think it is justifiable to suppose that they are the same, namely *pacifica*."

Hudson Bay Region: In the 'Ornithological Results of the Canadian 'Neptune' Expedition to Hudson Bay and Northward,' 1903-1904, Eifrig records (Auk, XXII, p. 234) both birds and eggs taken at Southampton Island by A. P. Low and that they were breeding abundantly. Mr. Taverner writes, "I have Low's Hudson Bay birds and I can see absolutely no difference between them and the Pacific. In fact, of some thirty birds taken from Southampton Island all along the Arctic Coast and B[ritish] C[olumbia] I can make but one form."

Cumberland Sound Region: Kumlien's record (Bull. 15, U. S. Nat. Mus.) is apparently our only authority for this region. While he states a bird was shot June 24, this specimen is not now in the National Museum and no others appear to have been taken.

Ungava: I do not know on what authority this loon has been attributed to Ungava. Turner in his list of Labrador birds (Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., 1885), based principally on his observations in Ungava, mentions only Stearns' record and this record refers to the Labrador coast and not to this locality. Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd found birds paired and evidently breeding on the east coast of James Bay but all were *pacifica*. Mr. J. H. Fleming writes that all birds from James Bay that he has seen were Pacific Loons.

Labrador: Audubon mentions (Birds of America) that he saw a few pairs while in Labrador, but apparently none were secured. He does not state where the specimens were obtained from which

his drawings were made but probably they were European birds. R. Bell records (Rep. Prog. Geol. Surv. Canada) male, female and young shot on Nottingham Island, Hudson Strait, August 28, 1884. If these birds were preserved they are not now in the museum at Ottawa. Mr. J. H. Fleming states that birds from Hudson Strait in his collection are *pacifica*. Mr. W. A. Stearns mentions (Notes on the Nat. Hist. of Labrador) two specimens shot by one of the French priests at Bersimis but does not indicate what finally became of them or if either was preserved. Dr. Charles W. Townsend informs us he does not know of any Labrador specimens of this species in any collection.

It appears that some form of Black-throated Loon occasionally occurs on the Labrador coast but until a specimen is secured and compared with specimens of *pacifica* it seems best to consider all records as more or less questionable.

Greenland: As *Gavia arctica* occurs in Iceland, it seems probable that it may occasionally be found in southern Greenland but there does not appear to be any trustworthy record. Mr. J. H. Fleming writes that he has specimens from the Carey Islands north of Baffin Bay and they are Pacific Loons.

Quebec: All records for this province that I have seen refer to Labrador.

New Brunswick: Baird, Brewer and Ridgway (Water Birds, Vol. 2) mention a single specimen taken at Point Lepreau, in the Bay of Fundy. This is the same as the record in the 'Proc. Bost. Soc. of Nat. Hist.,' Vol. 17. It is very indefinite and no further information is given. Herrick's statement (Bull. Essex Inst., Vol. 5) that this species "occurs in winter" at Grand Manan is not verified by more recent observers or substantiated by specimens.

Maine: A bird taken at Cutler, Maine, in December, 1881, is said to be in the possession of Mr. Newell Eddy of Bay City, Michigan. Knight says (Birds of Maine) that its correct identification has been "shown to be unquestionable." As so many specimens supposed to be correctly identified have proved to be something very different, it seems desirable that this bird be reexamined.

I am informed by Mr. Norman A. Wood that Mr. Eddy has recently passed away and it is not possible, at this time, to examine the birds in his collection.

Massachusetts: There is no authentic record for this State although young birds supposed to be Black-throated Loons have been occasionally recorded. The records are not allowed by Howe and Allen (Birds of Massachusetts).

Connecticut: Sage and Bishop (Birds of Connecticut) do not list this species in their book. It has been given by early writers, undoubtedly in error.

New York: A full plumaged adult male was shot April 29, 1893, on Long Island and was recorded by Mr. William Dutcher in 'The Auk', Vol. 10, p. 265. This record is the only one for New York that is based on an actual specimen and it has been very generally quoted. The bird is now in the American Museum of Natural History and Mr. W. DeW. Miller, who has recently critically examined and measured it, writes that it "is unquestionably *G. pacifica*."

South Carolina: Audubon is the only authority for the occurrence of the Black-throated Loon in this State. It has not since been observed. Wayne (Birds of South Carolina) states, "Audubon was unquestionably mistaken in the identification of the bird shot."

Texas: Audubon also recorded this species from Texas. Baird, Brewer and Ridgway discredit the record which is, with little doubt, an error.

Ontario: It is supposed that this loon has occurred several times in Ontario. Mr. J. H. Fleming has looked up several records from this region and says that, so far, he has "found no record that will bear investigation." Also, "if any Black-throated Loons occur in the Great Lakes they will be *pacifica*."

Ohio: There are also several supposed occurrences of this species in Ohio. Prof. Lynds Jones, writing in regard to these records, says, "Dr. Wheaton mentions the capture of one specimen, but on hearsay evidence. I had several reports of specimens captured by trustworthy persons, but I cannot vouch for them personally. A specimen was sent to me two years ago from Painesville, purported to be a Black-throated, but I did not make it out such, and so sent it to Oberholser, who pronounced it a Red-throated."

Illinois: Mr. Ridgway writes regarding including this loon in the avifauna of Illinois, that "it was based on purely 'general

considerations only' at a time when probably no one doubted the occurrence of that species in North America and that it was not based on a specimen. We were, unfortunately, not so particular about such things in the earlier days."

Wisconsin: It is supposed that the Black-throated Loon has been taken three times in Wisconsin. Kumlien and Hollister refer to these records (Birds of Wisconsin) very briefly. One is said to have been taken at Milwaukee and to be in the Public Museum of that city. Mr. Henry L. Ward, director of that institution, writes under date of February 8, 1917, "I have been trying to run down the reported Black-throated Loon contained in this museum, but can find no trace of it at all. The specimen is evidently not contained in any of our series of mounted birds, nor in the series of bird-skins." Another bird, taken at Racine, is reported to be in the collection of Dr. Hoy and a bird said to have been shot in 1860 on Rock River, near Janesville, in the collection of a gentleman from Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Hollister says of these records (letter February 20, 1917), the Rock River record "is from the notes of Thure Kumlien and considering the date and circumstances I should not accept it as a real record to-day." He further says, "I have been over the Hoy collection very carefully and do not remember seeing the specimen recorded from his collection, but as the Hoy collection was left without any labels whatever (except the *name* of the bird) and his records were not to be found, that record would be far from satisfactory." He concludes, "At any rate, I am prepared to drop the bird from the Wisconsin list."

Michigan: It was once supposed that this species occurred in Michigan but the latest authority on the birds of that State, Prof. W. B. Barrows (Michigan Bird Life) does not accept any of these records. He says, "We have been unable to find a Michigan specimen in any collection, and have been equally unsuccessful in finding an unquestionable record of its occurrence. Until something more definite can be shown it seems best to exclude it from the regular list."

Minnesota: Dr. P. L. Hatch (Notes on the Birds of Minnesota) lists this species on the strength of supposed specimens seen between 1858 and 1869. No birds were secured.

Iowa: Dr. R. M. Anderson records (Proc. Davenport Acad. Sci., Vol. XI) three specimens of this loon from Iowa. One was, at that time, in the collection of the State University at Iowa City (No. 10175). Regarding this bird Prof. Dayton Stoner writes, "I am sorry to report that I am unable to find any specimen of *Gavia arctica* in our collections." The two remaining records are of birds reported by Mr. H. J. Giddings. One of these is said to have been identified by Dr. C. Hart Merriam and is still in Mr. Giddings' possession. Dr. Merriam has written us that he does not now recall this bird but a memorandum he has, which was made in connection with the examination of this specimen, states that all United States records are *pacifica*. Mr. Giddings states in a recent letter that the bill of this bird measures 2.15 inches from which it seems evident that it is a Pacific Loon.

In a recent letter Dr. Anderson says, "I have no doubt personally that either *Gavia arctica* or *Gavia pacifica* occurs occasionally as stragglers or accidentally in Iowa. From what I have learned in the last few years, however, I am inclined to think the bird would be *pacifica*."

Nebraska: Regarding supposed records from this State Prof. Myron H. Swenk writes (January 27, 1917), "I think you will find that all of the several records of this species depend back on the record published in the 'Birds of Nebraska (1904)' from Curtis, Nebraska, in the Rees Heaton collection. This bird is in immature plumage and resembles in size and the broad edgings of the back feathers immature specimens of the black-throated loon, but a careful study I made of it a couple of years ago convinced me that it was really referable to the common loon. Fortunately, a little later Mr. H. C. Oberholser was visiting me at Lincoln and examined this specimen carefully, with the result that he pronounced it the common loon. We have accordingly stricken the black-throated loon from the Nebraska list, since this was the only specimen even supposed to be that species which has been taken in the state."

Colorado: All definite records from this State are from the vicinity of Colorado Springs. C. E. Aiken reported five birds taken, although apparently but one was preserved. This bird is in the Aiken collection at the Colorado College. Mr. Edward R. Warren

informs us this bird was sent to Prof. W. W. Cooke in 1915, and "he reported it to be an immature Common Loon." He also says, "Aiken told me that other Loons have been taken in this vicinity and were like this bird."

Washington: Mr. Samuel N. Rhoads recorded (Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. of Phila., 1893, p. 29) a female secured and others seen at Nisqually during April, 1892. This bird is now in the Academy of Natural Sciences and has been recently examined by Dr. Witmer Stone, who says, "I am confident that this specimen is only *immer*. It is very much worn and is 'made up' small. The bill is smaller than some specimens of *immer* but matched by others and is much larger than any *pacifica*." Dawson and Bowles (Birds of Washington) refer to another specimen, in the collection of the State Normal School at Bellingham, taken by J. M. Edson. Mr. Edson informs us that "this is clearly an error. I have never succeeded in securing a specimen of the Black-throated Loon. I think the statement was intended to apply to the Red-throated Loon."

British Columbia: According to Fannin this species has been taken at Burrard Inlet and at Dease Lake, Cassiar, B. C. I have not been able to obtain any further information concerning these records.¹

Conclusion: From the above it appears that there is not a single North American specimen of the Black-throated Loon in any collection in this country or Canada, with the exception of the three Alaskan birds. Every record that is based on a specimen proves to refer to some species other than *arctica* when the specimen is carefully examined. In view of this fact, we cannot place much value on the records that cannot be verified at the present time. The three Alaskan specimens, when compared with available material from Siberia and northern Europe, prove to be the Asiatic form, *Gavia arctica suschkini* Sarudny, and not *Gavia arctica arctica* (Linnæus). If this Asiatic subspecies is accepted as distinct from the European bird, it is this form that should appear on our Check-List and *Gavia arctica arctica* should be dropped until such time as a North American specimen is procured and, by careful comparison

¹ Since the above was written I have examined the two British Columbia birds. One is clearly a Pacific Loon. The other is most like Siberian specimens and may be a straggler from that country. It is *not* the European form of *arctica*.

with European birds, proved to be of that form. If, however, we do not recognize *Gavia arctica suschkini* as distinct, then the European bird is entitled to a place in our avifauna only on the strength of its casual occurrence in Alaska.

AN IMPROVED OBSERVATION TENT.

BY R. M. STRONG.

Plate X.

IN a preceding number¹ of this journal, I described with an illustration, a tent which I had used in studying gulls at their breeding places. This tent was a modification of a type described by Sawyer.² It is inexpensive and free from certain objectionable features of other bird blinds. However, it is small and low. Being only four feet high, one is not able to stand erect in it, and there is not sufficient space to handle apparatus comfortably. In the same communication, I stated that I had devised and used a larger tent since doing the work there described. It has occurred to me that an account of the improvements might be useful to some readers of this journal.

Tents of this type have no stay lines to interrupt the camera view, and they can be set up on rocky sites where it is not practicable to drive tent stakes. Furthermore, they are of very convenient shape, and are economical of ground space.

The contour of the tent is maintained by a frame which gives a flat horizontal roof and steep, slightly-sloping sides. The frame consists of eight poles held in position by four socket pieces at the corners of the roof and four anchoring poles to be described later. In the older tent, the frame poles were held together by blocks of

¹ Strong, R. M. On the Habits and Behavior of the Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus* Pont. The Auk, Vol. XXXI, Nos. 1-2, January-April, 1914. Plates III-X and XIX-XX, 1 text figure.

² Sawyer, E. J. A Special Bird-Blind. Bird Lore, Vol. XI, no. 2, March-April, 1909, pp. 71-73. One page of text figures.